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Chapter 5

Every pioneer family gathered enough herbs through the summer and fall months to last theoughout the year. These were hung to the rafters of the kitchen to dry, then were used to make teas to use for illness. Some of these herbs such as sage, rue and thyme were raised in their herb gardens. Many others such as catnip, horehound, fennel, privey, slippery elm and many others grew in profusion in most sections of the county, and all the pioneer women had to do was to gather and dry them. The very first doctors were these herb doctors, though most familys depended upon the mother knowing how to diagnose the case and to know which tea to give for that particular ailment. In almost every neighbor hood there was at least one woman who was a little more skilled in the knowledge of caring for the sick, aiding in child birth and in accident, who was called in if the family felt that they needed help, and no pioneer woman ever turned a neighbor down if she was able to help. There were on such things as steralized bandaging in those days, but every piece of worn, soft, white cloth was carefully laundered and put away in a trunk or box, to be used for the dressing of wounds. Even after there were a few country doctors, there were no telephones until 1898 and the only way a doctor could be gotten was for some one to ride horse back for many miles to the doctor's residence, then the doctor would have to mount his horse and ride to the patient, therefore,

it was necessary for every family to have some practical knowledge of the care of the sick, for it would sometimes be many hours or even days before a doctor could be gotten. There is a pathetic tradition that while John McNeel, the pioneer, was on the expedition to Point Pleasant in 1784, a child was born and died before his return. The mother with her own hands prepared the coffin and the grave, and buried it, thus performing the first burial rites ever performed in the McNeel graveyard.

Pioneer children were taught very young to not only help with the chores , but to meet with emergancys that arose. On one occasion when the older members of the family of William McCollam of Stony Creek, were at church the house caught on fire and was consumed with most of its contents. At the time of the burning, John, the eldest son, was about eight years old; Lawrence was about two. In the confusion the baby boy seems to have been forgotten, and when John asked where the baby was he was told by one of the little girls that he was in the cradle asleep. John pressed his way through the smoke and heat at the risk of his life, and brought his brother out alive, but in doing so both were so badly burned as to have scars upon their persons as long as they lived. William McCollam toiled on however; rebuilt his home, opened up more land, and in the meanwhile eleven children had gathered around his table. At the time when his care and presence seemed most needed, it seemed good to the God he [illegible] loved to call him away from a responsibility so important. The sugar season had just opened- the morning was such as to indicate a heavy run, and much wood was nedded to keep the kettles boiling fast enough. On the 4th of March, 1818, he had morning prayer,

sang a hymn of praise to Him who watches the sparrow when it fall and went forth cheerfully to his work. A large red oak tree suited to his purpose was selected, which soon bowed and fell beneath his stalwart strokes, but somehow a limb from another tree in its rebound smote him with such furious force that he never seemed to be conscious of what happened. Though all this was sudden, there was no misgiving about the certainty of his having found rest from his honest toils and effort to meet his duties, the rest that remains for the people of God. He had learned from his Scotch ancestry to sing:

"The sword, the pestilence, or fire,
Shall but fulfill their best desire,
From sin and sorrow set them free,
And bring thy children,Lord to thee."

John Wanless married Elizabeth Bridger. She was noted for her skill in nursing the sick, and her services were in demand far and near. Sick people had so much confidence in her that they seemed to think there was no danger of dying if Mrs. Wanless could be had in time.

From---- History of Pocahontas--Price

Clothes for bandaging was steralized,after the coming of the cook stove, by placing it in the oven for a few minutes.

Their food was also seasoned with herbs such as sage,red peppers and others raised at home.

- - - the cold air.

Mar. 23, 1940

Nelle Y. Mclaughlin
Marlinton, W. Va.

Pocahontas County

Chapter 5 - Section 2

The pioneers who made their way into this unbroken wilderness to build homes were denied the comforts of life which the present generation enjoy. To survive, all had to work. The logs in the pioneer homes were put in place with such precision that in some instances the work appeared to be done by machinery. There still remain in the County some of these old buildings with the logs lying in the same perfect shape in which they were placed more than one hundred years ago. Many of these houses have since been weatherboarded and ceiled inside and with the original chimneys and stone fireplaces preserved, they make a most comfortable home.

Between the logs of the houses, there were one or more port holes cut so that the pioneer could defend themselves from the savages with a rifle. The clap-boards used for the roof were about four feet long and care was always used to put them on the building in the light of the moon as the understanding was, whether true or not, that if they were placed on the building in the dark of the moon, they would cup up at the end, whereas, if placed on the building in the dark of the moon, they would lie flat.

The smaller cracks in the floor were stuffed with rags and there were always plenty of wild game hides which were used to cover the larger cracks and one was always used at the foot of the door to keep out the cold air.

Usually one of these puncheons in the floor would not be fastened down and underneath would be the vegetables and the syrup. Mr. Adkison told me of an incident which happened when he was a small boy. He, with some other boys, went in the spring of the year to the cabin of an old lady who lived in the mountains to get apples. The door was open but noone was to be found. After a consultation at the door about the disappointment, it was decided to move on. About that time one of the boys observed this loose puncheon slowly rising from the floor and presently the head of the old lady appeared above the floor with tangled hair and a none too clean face. She crawled out and asked the boys what they would have. When they told her it was apples, she went back down and began to toss them out. The boys gathered around this opening to the ground and discovered that in addition to this place being a cold storage for the apples, directly beneath this puncheon was also the sleeping quarters of this poor old unfortunate lady.

The out buildings built, after the new home was completed, were a cow shed, a spring house, and there was always close by the ash hopper. The ash hopper was built for the purpose of making lye with which to make soap. It was also used to remove the outer covering and the heart from the corn to be used for making hominy. It was built with clap-boards, the bottom ends sitting close together in a spout made from a small short log. The boards at the top were supported by a frame large enough to give the ash hopper its proper shape and size. As ashes were re-

moved from the fireplace, they were placed in this hopper. In the spring of the year, water was poured in at the top on the ashes. In about twenty-four hours lye would begin to slowly drip from the end of the spout. It was then only a few days until "soap day" and enough soap would be made to last until the next spring.

The cow and the horse shed was at first a rude affair. It was made for the purpose of sheltering the cow and horses from falling weather and not designed as a place where they might take refuge from the cold.

The spring house was a valuable asset to the home of the early settlers, and is still to be seen occasionally in the country. They were always constructed over the spring where the supply of drinking water came from. Usually a shallow excavation would be made to get down to solid earth and then smooth shallow rocks would be carried in and placed as close together as possible. Of course in time these rocks would become embedded in the earth giving the spring house the appearance of having a rock foundation, and over these rocks the water would run from the spring into the house. Placed here and there on these rocks would be the milk crocks, the butter jar, the churn in which cream was being accumulated for the next churning, and other things to be kept cool and fresh. Mr. Adkison recalls the spring house of "Aunt Fanny" McNeill, located in the pioneer settlement on the waters of Swago Creek, as a perfect model for a perfect setting. Her spring house was located something like one hundred and fifty yards from the house at the foot of a hill, and surrounded

by shade trees. Within this house were the rocks placed there many years before, the cold water running over them, and the milk crocks, butter jar, churn and other containers placed there to keep cool. Everything was spotlessly clean and it was a pleasant place to step into on a sweltering day. One hundred years from now the spring house will have been forgotten but they contributed in no small degree to the comfort of the early settlers.

The food of the pioneers was plain and plentiful but limited in variety. The woods abounded with deer. They were so plentiful that one could be killed at any time. They were plentiful in Pocahontas County until the modern repeating rifle and shot gun first made their appearance. There were many other kinds of wild game. The streams were full of fish. With plenty of wild meat accompanied by sweetened corn pone and such vegetables as potatoes, hanovers, and beans, they had plenty. Berries, apples and peaches were dried in the sun, as were many of the vegetables raised.

Told to me by Mr. D. C. Adkison